

A Parents' Guide to Early Literacy Supports



Supporting Early Literacy in Alaska

Because learning to read is the foundation on which all future learning is built, the Alaska legislature and the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development have made development of early literacy a priority. This brochure contains information about early literacy, home activities that parents can use to help children become stronger readers, and where to find online resources.

This brochure also describes the ways Alaska's public schools will measure how well students in kindergarten through grade 2, and selected students in grade 3, are reading. These tools will identify children who are having difficulties, so they can receive help.

Meeting the department's goal of ensuring college, career and culturally ready graduates starts with making sure all students have a firm foundation in early literacy. We are working with districts, schools, and parents to make that happen.



Early Literacy Development

It is important that young children get off to a strong start in learning to read, research shows. Children who have a poor start often continue to do poorly in future grades. Only about 10% of poor 1st-grade readers catch up to their peers by grade 4, studies say. But with early identification and targeted help, students can catch up.

Here are some ways to make sure children get off to a good start in reading.

Extra Help

Schools help struggling young readers in various ways. These methods might include more instructional time; putting students into smaller groups; having more adults in a classroom at certain times; providing more practice opportunities using computer programs, adult volunteers, or older student tutors; using other learning materials; pre-teaching or re-teaching certain skills; and adding summer or after-school programs. Be sure to ask about the methods used at your school.

Home Literacy Plans


Many schools provide parents with information about the specific skills being taught each week or during each unit of study, and how parents can help students practice those skills. Home literacy plans might include parents reading with their children, participating in class projects, or providing effective homework support.

Grade Retention Standards and Policies

Districts decide when to retain students in a grade. Parents should be familiar with the policies that govern grade retention at their school.

Access to Research-based Information and Resources

The department will regularly post information online to help parents learn about early literacy



research and methods they can use to help their children become better readers. Examples are recommendations about books to read with and to children, and home activities to build vocabulary, improve comprehension, or strengthen awareness of the way words sound. Please go to <http://education.alaska.gov> and click on the yellow Parent/Community star.



Early Literacy Screening

What is it and why it is important?

All students in kindergarten to grade 2, plus 3rd-graders who have reading delays, will be assessed for several key reading skills. This identifies students who are struggling. These students can receive additional instruction specifically targeted to their needs. Accurate early screening helps teachers and parents address reading problems before they become more apparent in later grades and more difficult to address.

What are the assessment tools and what skills do they assess?

Each school district will select an assessment from a list approved by the department. The tools can see how well students sound out the correct letter, break a word into its individual sounds, read words quickly and with understanding, pronounce written words, know how printed language works, and understand word parts and how they relate to meaning.

How will I know the results of my child's assessment?

Districts will share the results with all parents once a year. Parents whose children are identified as experiencing difficulties with reading will be given results twice a year.

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At-Home Activities

- Encourage your child to notice and recognize letters and words they know on all kinds of print materials such as signs, food containers, and advertisements.
- Make sure you have a variety of informational and story books available at home or from the library, so you can read together every day. Read to your child from books somewhat above his or her grade level and have your child read grade level text to you once he or she can read independently.
- Have fun with words. Play rhyming games, say all the words you can think of that start or end with the same letter, practice saying tongue twisters, make up silly sentences where all the words start with the same letter, and break words into syllables.
- Keep writing materials in one place and encourage your child to make lists, write and illustrate stories, write letters to family members, and create birthday cards.
- Do lots of talking with your child. Make up stories together, have them describe things they did at school or what they see out the window or in a picture, and retell a story you read recently. Use interesting and varied words when you have conversations with your child and encourage him or her to do the same.
- Encourage reading as a free-time activity and model it yourself. Take a book or magazine to appointments, read instead of watching television or playing computer games, discuss what you are reading and ask your child about books he or she is reading (what he or she likes best, doesn't like, and think will happen next).



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